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ABSTRACT

This handbook is designed to acquaint parents of students attending Mitchell College of the administrative and academic policies and procedures of the college. Discussions of registration, likely problems a student may encounter during the first semester, how and when parents can learn about a student's academic progress, academic standards, graduation and transfer requirements, and proper role for parents are presented. Sample administrative letters are also included. (MB)

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PARENT HANDBOOK

1978-1979

Mitchell College

JC 790 047

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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David Harvey

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

What Is The Educational System At Mitchell And How, As A Parent, Do I Fit In?

Many parents, particularly those of new students, have questions about Mitchell's academic process. They often want to know the manner in which the College counsels students and monitors their educational progress. Parents want to be of maximum help to their daughters and sons in their efforts to be successful and they can be a great resource to the Faculty and to the Counseling and Administrative staff providing they have some idea of how the College monitors student academic life. The objective of what follows is to explain our system on registration, advising, academic monitoring and the parent's role in these matters. It is our hope that this presentation will provide parents with more information about Mitchell's academic system, thus enabling them to provide more informed and meaningful encouragement to their sons and daughters.

A recent article by our Director of Public Relations clarifies the College's objective succinctly:

> The formula Mitchell has followed has been one of consistency -- don't jump on faddish educational bandwagons, maintain academic and admission standards, challenge the student but help him constantly along the way.
>
> In pursuit of these goals, Mitchell has maintained an energetic team of admissions representatives charged with the recruitment of students who can best benefit from Mitchell's approach to higher education.
>
> The college has retained a stable, teaching faculty committed to just one goal: developing competent students; and backing up the faculty is a pervasive counseling system designed not only to cope with both academic and personal problems, but also to ferret out potential difficulty and by so doing to avert failure.
>
> This kind of individualized attention, especially during the often difficult transition years, is the key to the academic success of a large part of the student body; and success stories from alumni --about 80 percent of whom transfer into senior college programs--bear this out.

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The "transition years," which have been called the years of "emerging adulthood," are often a time when students are struggling to establish their "identity" as independent persons. At the same time, they are trying to cope with the need for academic achievement. Students often seem at this time self-absorbed, self-centered and interested only in their own gratification. These attitudes are difficult ones with which to deal, and help is often needed.

Counseling and teaching students can be a challenging and awesome task, perhaps second only to the vocation of parenthood. College professor Richard Boubjerg, in a brief article written a short time ago (The National Observer 2-5-77) captures what we are trying to do:

> When you and I matured, we, too, were formed of our genes and experiences. Yet we could have lived hundreds of different lives. But when we end our lives, we will have lived only one. So with your children now. Assistance in helping your children find the most rewarding path is our major role.

How Does A Student Get Started?

After all the college investigations are completed, students and their parents decide on Mitchell. Application is made, a program is selected; admission is granted; the deposit is made; and, the student enters the registration system. An Advisor is assigned and planning is begun. Sounds simple? Perhaps it does, but the "crunch" is yet to come. The first semester for many students requires many adjustments. It's often a difficult time socially as well as academically. Let's see how a student gets started academically.

What's Involved In Registration?

Students are seen individually (or sometimes in small groups by program enrollment) so that advising and course scheduling can be completed for the student's selected program. Often students change their minds about the program initially selected and want to switch to a different one. Normally, this poses no great problem but the changes must be cleared with the Admissions Office before registration, and, during or after registration, must be approved by the Dean. Careful advisement is needed at this point since the student must be made aware of the new program's requirements.

Course registration includes the completion of numerous information cards, the final selection of courses consistent with the student's program (this is done with an advisor), the scheduling of classes, the submission of the College Health Form, and the final payment of outstanding fees. Some of this may take place in the summer but all steps must be completed no later than registration day.

Once the semester is underway, program changing and advising are normally handled by our Counseling Center staff. The counselors are prepared to help a student evaluate the totality of his or her progress including the appropriateness of the initial choice of program. While the counselors see students regularly on these matters, this is not to imply that students should not consult with other faculty or administrative persons. On the contrary, faculty members are frequently sought out by students for advice on programs and courses and this tends to provide students with added insight and objectivity. The counselors tend to carry on longer term counseling with regard to educational and career planning which might also include the introduction of interest and aptitude testing. Thus, help is available on program and course selection from a variety of college personnel.

What Problems Are Likely To Surface Once The Semester Has Begun?

Three to four weeks into the semester instructors give the first round of quizzes and in some cases, tests. At this point, the faculty is asked to submit D and F grades to the Dean of the College. Those students involved are then sent a polite but urgent letter requesting that they (1) see their instructors for help, and, (2) see a counselor for study counsel. This procedure is called the "Early Warning System." A frequent problem at this point is the inability of the student to set priorities. For many, social matters often interfere with academic commitments. For example, a student may sleep through too many 8 o'clock classes because of "partying" the night before. Others attempting to "lengthen" weekends, may skip Friday afternoon classes or return to the campus late on Monday.

The intent of this "Early Warning" system is to alert the students to their academic standing early in order to give them a chance to recover. We do not automatically make an appointment to see a student at this time; the goal of the letter is to stimulate the student into initiating action in his/her own behalf. We are trying, at this point, to encourage individual responsibility. We are saying, "Hey, here's your chance to take charge of your life. There's help available; here's how to get it." Many students take advantage of the opportunity.

Parents can and should take an active role in encouraging students to go for help early if it is needed. The earlier a student takes advantage of the opportunity to explore academic difficulties, the better the chance for success. It is part of the parent's responsibility to the student to make the College (counselor, Dean, faculty member) aware of any potential problem early so that precious time is not wasted trying to find out what's going on with a particular student.

Do You Just Let Them Flounder?

No, but some floundering is necessary for learning to take place. Instructors and counselors go out of their way to approach students who they know are in trouble. A floundering student is not difficult to identify by an experienced eye. Students will find helpful, sympathetic instructors who need only be asked for help. Counselors are trained to help a student explore intensively the reasons for non-achievement and the reasons for less than sufficient motivation. Normally, outside tutors are not necessary; instructor help should be sufficient. If a tutor is necessary, we will try to find one.

When and How Do Parents Learn About Students' Academic Progress?

The most direct way to find out how your student is progressing is to ask him/her to tell you. Most students are open and frank with their parents; but occasionally some may leave out significant pieces of information when reporting to the home front. For example, Jack did reasonably well in high school, coasting along with good grades without having to exert much effort. Here at Mitchell, he has a D in Math and tells Dad, "I'm working my head off but just can't get it." In his report to Dad he fails to mention that the class meets at 7:50 a.m. and he has missed four out of the first nine classes. Moreover, he has not asked the instructor for help nor has he seen a counselor for academic guidance.

Also, it is easy for us humans to blame others for our shortcomings and some students occasionally do this. We sometimes hear, "The teacher can't explain it so I can understand"; "There's too much noise in the dorm"; "My books were stolen"; etc. These statements may be fact, but we must be wary because often they are put forth to cover up another problem. So while it is helpful to be kept informed by a son/daughter, be a little skeptical about the reasons presented for "bad news."

In answer to the question posed at the beginning of this section, parents will receive mid-term grades in the mail seven to eight weeks after the semester starts. These are not final grades and are not recorded on the student's transcript. The grades can fluctuate depending on what happens between the halfway point and final exams. At this halfway mark, we send students who have D's or F's a letter asking that an appointment be made with the Dean or one of the counselors. If the student fails to make an appointment, a second request is sent to the student and a copy to the parent. Those who responded at the "Early Warning" point are seen again but at this point are probably being seen for study counsel on a continuing basis. When the student comes for the appointment we make a brief but thorough assessment of the problem and help the student plan corrective actions.

Parents should feel free to call at this time for further information about academic progress. If a copy of the "Second Request Letter" is received, urge your student to take action.

In summary, the following table outlines the major academic progress check points in the semester. Please note that at points 4 and 5, you may have an opportunity to help us.

Event	Procedure and Timetable
1. Registration for courses	After Labor Day
2. Change of course period	Up to one week after classes begin
3. Change of program	Any time with permission
4. Early Warning Grade Check (D's and F's only)	D's and F's received by student 3 to 4 weeks after semester starts. Student urged to see instructor or a counselor (see sample letter). Parents may call for information.
5. Mid-term grades submitted for all students in all courses.	Student receives grades through mail half-way through semester. D and F students requested to see Dean or Counselor by Appointment. (See sample letter.) Parents receive copy of mid-term grades by mail within two weeks of posting. Parents receive copy of second request letter to students (if any) to make academic appointment.
6. Final exams	Approximately 13 weeks after semester begins. Final grades mailed to student at home address after recording. Dismissal, probation, warning letters mailed as soon as possible. Dean's List and Commendable Scholarship letters mailed in January and May.

Does Mitchell Have Unusually High Academic Standards?

The answer to this question depends upon the individual student since each has his or her style of learning, abilities, background, experience and motivation. However, Mitchell is not easy. Our transfer record is strong and students are well prepared for upper division work when they elect to transfer. Our courses parallel four-year college courses for the first two years. Our faculty places reasonable but challenging demands on their students. If students take the work seriously, they will have plenty to do. Thirty or more hours per week spent in study outside class is quite probably necessary to be a successful student, especially in the first year.

As discussed earlier, support services are available to enable a student to meet the demands of college life. Counselors, instructors and administrators can provide valuable assistance in "learning how to learn." On this point, we have discovered that occasionally students need help in learning to be more self-assertive in pursuing their work.

It should be noted here that serious academic problems always result from "cutting" too many classes. Cutting classes undermines progress and wastes money. We have a strong policy on cutting and the conscientious student does not cut classes. There is a strong, positive relationship between regular class attendance and acceptable grades; consequently we monitor attendance, give warnings when excessive absences occur and take action when necessary. An F can be assigned in a course for repeated non-attendance without a valid reason.

What Are The Graduation Requirements And When Should Transfer Take Place?

To earn the Associate Degree (the two-year college degree) at Mitchell, a minimum of 62 academic credits with a 2.00 Q.P.A. are required. This total includes two credits in physical education. Some of our programs (see the Catalog) require more credits. Normally, a student will complete these credits and program requirements in four semesters. However, if courses are failed or dropped, or if less than the normal load of five courses is taken, a student will have to make up credits in the summer, take more than the normal five courses in a given semester or return for a fifth semester. The counseling or administrative staff can supply students with appropriate semester planning strategies if such problems develop.

Students may transfer up to 30 credits from accredited colleges other than Mitchell and apply these credits toward their Mitchell diploma. The credits transferred must be at least C level. Credits, not grades are transferred.

Transfer to four-year colleges and universities is best accomplished when a student has established a consistent, acceptable level of achievement. This usually means, 1) four semesters at Mitchell (during which the Associate Degree would be completed), and, 2) the attainment of a 2.50 cumulative average. If these two criteria are achieved, transfer to selected colleges is usually no problem. For many students, the two-year program provides the opportunity to prove themselves and to develop stronger learning skills. To cut short this development before the two-year period is completed inhibits the full maturation of the qualities that produce good academic achievement here and at the upper division level.

What Is The Right Role For Parents Of College Students?

Obviously, there is no one "right" role for parents as their offspring start college. As we all know, parents are required to play many and varied roles depending on the circumstances and maturity of their children. Parental roles are further complicated by the fact that while parents are normally (but not legally) responsible for their offspring, they have only partial authority and control over them. Paradoxically, parental authority has been eroded gradually in recent years without a parallel reduction of parental responsibility. Indeed, one can escape from many things --marriage, job, etc. -- without undue criticism, but one cannot honorably withdraw from the role of parenthood! Your "parenting" obviously does not stop when your offspring enroll in college; it takes on new dimensions. The early college years are full of changes. Parents must shed day-to-day responsibility for their teenagers and accept a new relationship of support, encouragement and counsel.

One specific thing a parent can do is to share information. Some years ago, we had the practice of inviting parents to share information with us by letter, before the semester started, which they believed would be useful to us in working with their student. (We are reinstating this practice, incidentally). We normally received a response from one-third of our parents. This response should be born in mind when reading what follows.

These letters had recurring themes which were interesting because they showed that parents shared many common concerns about their children. Some of these themes involved worries over lack of motivation, goals and purposes; concern over poor study habits; difficulty with certain subjects such as math; concern about gaps in early education caused by moving, by poor teachers and by schools, etc.; worry about interest in athletics or some other "outside" activity to the exclusion of studies; and a general concern that the son/daughter did not like to ask for extra help. Sometimes outstanding brothers or sisters were mentioned. Occasionally, a learning disability or physical handicap was cited.

More on the positive side, concerns were expressed about the need for a daughter or son to continue to develop a talent in music, dramatics, athletics, student government leadership, writing, and a chance to mature in a somewhat "protected" environment. A common attitude was expressed about the positive nature of a small campus environment for their student.

For a few parents the foregoing may ring a bell or two. They are mentioned here because we are sensitive to these concerns and we try to respond to them in constructive ways.

What else, specifically, can parents do? We can remind you of several other fundamental things.

First, while financial sacrifices have to be made as never before to send a student to college, don't underscore the sacrifices too heavily. At the same time, parents have the right to expect and insist on solid effort from their student. Moreover, it is hardly unreasonable today to expect students to earn part of their college expenses through part-time or summer work.

Second, a knowledgeable Dean from a mid-western college commented several years ago on what to him was the essence of being a good college parent:

> College is (one of) the last station stop(s) in the passage out of adolescence into independent adulthood. Naturally, you are anxious to make this passage a successful one for your children -- and you, of course, can offer more aid than anyone else. But you must steer a middle course between holding on to your children as dependents on the one hand, and, on the other, dropping all demands and expectations. You must encourage your sons and daughters to think, choose, and act for themselves. (Wilbur Pillsbury, "Leave Your Students Alone," Better Homes, Oct. 1966.)

Third, the above comment and our experience suggest that an encouraging, positive attitude on the part of parents within a framework of expectation of academic mastery and achievement is a wise course to follow. We believe that low standards for students do not contribute to high achievement.

Fourth, keep open lines of communication with your son or daughter. In the first year or two of college (sometimes more) many students struggle with their new found freedom, have difficulties dealing with alcohol, sex, etc. and have deep concerns or turmoil over career and educational decisions. These struggles eventually produce maturation but can also inhibit academic achievement, sometimes severely. You can help by talking over these concerns with your student and by urging counseling, if necessary.

Fifth, opportunities for your student to mature must not be removed. That is, provide appropriate advice and guidance when needed but otherwise a "hands off" policy, normally, is advisable. One learns from making mistakes and students must have normal opportunities for independent decision making and must have the responsibility for the consequencies of their own actions.

Sixth, extending the concept suggested in the last item, we are fond of a passage at the end of Roger H. Garrison's book, The Adventure of Learning in College. This passage suggests the need for "mutual acceptance" between parent and student. The parent's job of upbringing and training is largely done now, he says, and they must give up protecting, however difficult this is to do. At the same time, the student must accept the fact that parental concern for their development and happiness continues and does not end abruptly upon enrollment in college. There is a period of adjustment for parents, too, when children go away to college. Mr. Garrison's advice to students and to parents on their relationship captures what we are trying to say. The word daughter/woman/girl could be substituted for son/man/boy.

> The key to the proper parental attitude could lie in a letter that one father wrote his son. The son had felt, as many students do, a deep sense of obligation to his parents. His father was a brilliant lawyer who had achieved a splendid record in his college days. Yet the son's college career was undistinguished and ordinary. It worried the boy. In one letter home he wrote, "I feel as though I owe you more than I have been able to repay. I am not doing as well as I know you want me to. I am sorry. I'll try to make it up to you somehow." The father's letter in return, was heartlifting in its simplicity and affection. "Son," he wrote, "you 'owe' your mother and me nothing that you have not already repaid in full measure. When you were born, you brought us joy. In your childhood, you were a fine, manly little youngster. Now, you are a decent, honest, and intelligent young man. We ask no more of you than this: That you be yourself, and that you see yourself as we do, with confidence and respect. (p. 269).

Dean of the College
March 1978

Helpful suggestions and editorial comments were provided by many people in preparation of this article and are gratefully acknowledged. In particular, thanks are extended to Theodore Hargrove, Director of Public Relations; Doris Levinson, Counselor; Edward O'Neill, Director of Admissions; and Jeffrey Turner, Counselor; Joan Harvey, Laura Hesslein, Director Counseling Center.

SAMPLE LETTER #1

MITCHELL COLLEGE
NEW LONDON, CONNECTICUT

February 1978

TO:_____

FROM: David Harvey, Dean

You are one of a sizeable number of students whose names were submitted to me recently by faculty members for academic deficiency or other various academic problems. This is an initial first judgement on the part of faculty members but is important for it may suggest further trouble "down the road."

In this situation, which we refer to as our "Early Warning System," it seems wise to communicate with you to offer you the opportunity to 1) consult with me or one of the counselors in the Counseling Center and, of critical importance, 2) that you consult with the instructor who has identified an academic deficiency on your part. I ask you most sincerely to do both of these things. Quick action on this is in your best interests.

Appointments may be made directly with the Counseling Center or with my office. Mrs. Silverman, secretary of the Counseling Center in Mitchell Hall, handles the appointments for the counselors. Denise Covino in the Dean's office in Mitchell Hall makes appointments for me. See your instructor during his/her office hours as posted on their office doors.

Mrs. Levinson's Office Hours are:

Monday	10:00 - 1:00; 3:00 - 5:00
Tuesday	9:00 - 12:30
Wednesday	9:00 - 1:00; 2:00 - 4:00
Thursday	1:00 - 3:00

Mr. Ball's Office Hours are:

Monday	11:00 - 12:00; 1:00 - 2:00
Tuesday	10:30 - 11:20; 2:00 - 3:00
Wednesday	11:00 - 12:00; 1:00 - 2:00
Thursday	10:30 - 11:20; 2:00 - 3:00
Friday	10:00 - 12:00; 1:00 - 2:00

Mr. Turner's Office Hours are

Monday	9:00 - 11:20; 3:30 - 4:00
Tuesday	9:00 - 12:00; 1:00 - 1:30; 4:30 - 5:00
Wednesday	9:00 - 10:00
Thursday	9:00 - 12:00; 1:00 - 2:40
Friday	9:00 - 11:20; 1:30 - 5:00

Please be assured that we stand ready to help you be a more effective student in any way that we can.

Courses reported: ___

cc: Student File
DWH/dc

_____ _____

SAMPLE LETTER #2

___First Request _____

___Second Request_____

M I T C H E L L C O L L E G E

OFFICE OF THE DEAN OF THE COLLEGE

TO: All students experiencing academic difficulty at mid-semester

FROM: Dean David Harvey

The mid-term grades are in. You now have yours, I trust.

There are many students having difficulty in varying degrees. Many have had brief contacts with me or a counselor. Many are seeing a counselor for extensive study counsel. All should be getting help from instructors where needed. Unfortunately, many do not seek the help they need. It is not too late, however.

I want you to make an appointment for an "academic checkup" conference with one of our counselors or with myself. (Some of you who have seen me already may wish to see me again.) The appointments will be brief (10 to 15 minutes) but important. The counselors and myself will try to zero in on the chief problem and possible remedies for you to consider. More extensive follow-up help is possible and might include our program "Career Counseling Orientation" (P103) for one credit. So, please act on this request immediately. Go to the Counseling Center to make an appointment with either Mr. Ball, Ms. Hesslein, Mrs. Levinson or Mr. Turner. Or, come to my office for an appointment with me.

I have a master list of those to whom I am sending this letter. If you fail to make an appointment in one or two days, I am going to remind you to do so because I believe it is in your best interests. We are setting aside time for these meetings with you.

Please look over the enclosed sheet in order to prepare for your meeting. Some honest thought put on this may help you in the remainder of the semester. Bring the sheet with you to your conference. Thank you.

DWH/dc

UNIVERSITY OF CALIF.
LOS ANGELES

FEB 2 1979

CLEARINGHOUSE FOR
JUNIOR COLLEGES

DISCLOSURE, LETTER #2

Mitchell College, Dean's Office

Please bring this sheet with you when you come to your conference.

I want to make three matters clear before your academic checkup conference:

1. Why have you been called to make an appointment?

   You have been called because at least one of your instructors has indicated that you are in danger of failing his/her course. I want you to recognize this danger.

2. What is the purpose of this meeting?

   What can you and I or a counselor accomplish in a few minutes? Many things! We meet and we can find some immediate means of helping you. If you want help. Ten or fifteen minutes, however, can be wasted if you are not interested in helping yourself. If you are, these 10 or 15 minutes can be time well spent.

3. What can you do to help yourself?

   Many students do not know about or are reluctant to seek help that is available. At Mitchell, we have a counseling service and instructors who put aside at least five hours a week to talk with students. Any one of these services can help you--now. You should leave this academic meeting with a definite recovery program in mind. You are not condemned to labor under poor study skills, you CAN improve them.

To the crucial matter: why are you in academic difficulty? I want you to write brief responses to the following questions and bring them with you to your meeting.

1. What is the main reason for your poor academic performance? (Lack of study? poor study habits? secondary school preparation? personal problems? study conditions? other/)

2. What do you intend to do to improve your academic standing? Don't answer this question flippantly or quickly. If the answer is "nothing," have the courage to write "nothing." Be honest with your self.

Finally, this is a brief interview; you can follow it up at any time with a more extended interview or by taking P 103. Your instructors, the counselors and I stand ready to help you in any way we can. You are not engaged in a struggle with a system for a grade. You are involved in a personal battle to achieve your potential as a human being. We are here to help you realize this goal.

DWH/dc 11/77